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ABSTRACT

This annotated bibliography contains selected sources on reduction in force indexed in the ERIC system. Most of the journal articles and documents annotated here deal with the impact of declining enrollments on school staffs, with changes in personnel policy to cope with the need to reduce the number of employees in elementary schools, secondary schools, and junior colleges, and with the legal aspects of reduction in force, as well as with other areas. While the majority of these sources approaches this subject from the school administrator's perspective, one article presents the teacher's viewpoint on staff reduction. These 13 sources are to be regarded as a representative selection of materials on this subject, not as a complete catalog of ERIC sources. (DS)

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The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give the practicing educator easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

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Reduction in Force

1. Downey, Gregg W. "What School Boards Do When That Irresistible Force Called RIF Meets That Immoveable Object Called Affirmative Action." *The American School Board Journal*, 163, 10 (October 1976), pp. 35-39. EJ 146 473.

Downey discusses in detail what most publications only briefly mention. The inevitable conflict staff reduction poses between the demands of seniority and affirmative action. The "last hired, first fired" seniority formula for reduction, viewed by many as the most objective and favored by teachers, will, he states, force districts to fire minority and women staff recently hired to achieve racial and sexual equity. The conflict of seniority and equity, he warns, "can pitch a school system into a turmoil of litigation and labor disputes."

Downey's survey of school system problems and policies offers some valuable suggestions for districts. One district, he reports, seems to have developed a workable reduction policy that balances the demands of seniority and equity. The district follows seniority in reducing staff until reduction will unduly hit affirmative action staff, at which time it takes special action to shield them. It must maintain the percentage of affirmative action staff that existed at the beginning of the year prior to reduction.

Local control, Downey argues, may provide the most workable and only approach to the problem. The courts and the federal and state governments have provided little help, and local districts are "virtually alone in their search for equitable, impartial solutions."

2. Illinois State Office of Education. *Report of the Illinois Task Force on Declining Enrollments in the Public Schools*. Springfield, Illinois. 1975. 94 pages. ED 116 353.

Illinois expects its school enrollment to drop 20 percent between 1971 and 1985. Seeking information on the decline, the state charged a task force to study the problem and recommend appropriate state and local action.

The task force report, detailed and well written, discusses enrollment projection, declining enrollment economics, school closing, staffing, and new program opportunities. It emphasizes the need for data-based and systematic planning and the importance of community involvement. Much of the report concerns

state level action, and no doubt some of the issues are peculiar to Illinois; but it also offers practical suggestions for local districts.

The chapter on staffing lists the kinds of data necessary for developing staffing patterns and presents general issues for district consideration. It also provides six alternatives to reduction. Districts, it states, can (1) decrease class size; (2) examine the possibility of cutting expenses for administration, maintenance, and other services; (3) employ dismissed teachers as substitutes, teacher aides, or advisors; (4) channel staff into positions in new and expanding programs; (5) have dismissed teachers fill in for teachers taking extended leave; and (6) provide incentives for early retirement. The task force recommends, and discusses in detail, early retirement without loss of benefits at age fifty-five.

3. Lombardi, John. *Reduction in Force. An Analysis of the Policies and Their Implementation. Topical Paper No. 48*. Los Angeles: ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, University of California, 1974. 36 pages. ED 099 043.

After decades of growth, community colleges, like the public schools, have unexpectedly faced declining enrollments and financial problems, beginning in the early seventies. They have consequently, Lombardi reports, been forced to reduce staff on a large scale. Lombardi's overview of community college reduction problems and policies, well documented and illustrated by example, should prove helpful to similarly plagued public school districts.

Lombardi warns from the start that colleges should not use staff reduction as a means to suddenly begin firing unwanted teachers. They should carefully develop both procedures (which are at issue in most court challenges) that guarantee due process and reduction policies that prevent arbitrary or discriminatory dismissal.

Upon a full review of institution policies, collective bargaining agreements, and court action, Lombardi concludes that staff reduction will present the least problem when reduction criteria are objective and easily identified and when faculty participate in policy development, receive early warning of possible reductions, and enjoy opportunities for reassignment, retraining, and rehiring, if dismissed. Of prime importance, he states, is the willingness of administrators to consider all alternatives to actual dismissal.

4. Minnesota Association of School Administrators; Minnesota State Department of Education; Minnesota State Planning Agency; and Bureau of Field Studies and Surveys, University of Minnesota. *Planning for Declining Enrollments. Planning Assistance Manual and Case Studies*. St. Paul and Minneapolis 1976. 246 pages. ED 128 918

This thorough publication consists of five case studies of districts that have suffered enrollment declines and an eighty-page manual. The case studies are detailed but emphasize the districts' problems rather than the process of resolution. They show that for many districts declining enrollments and financial problems have hurt morale, hampered innovation, limited planning horizons, and magnified concern with job security.

The clear manual, "illustrative" rather than "definitive," offers numerous district examples, alternative methods, and practical and usable tools for planning. It treats in detail the collection and analysis of planning data, the assessment of problems, and some alternative solutions. In discussing the analysis of staffing needs and expenditures, which account for 80 percent of the budget, the manual suggests that districts (1) anticipate the long-range effects on the budget of the distribution of the staff on the salary schedule, (2) project teacher and other staff needs, (3) determine the rate of natural staff attrition, and (4) prepare for layoffs by determining the seniority and qualifications of staff. The manual's value comes from placing staff reduction concerns within the framework of comprehensive and ordered planning for declining enrollment.

5. National School Boards Association. *Declining Enrollment. Research Report*. Evanston, Illinois 1970. 30 pages. ED 122 439

Because of an unexpected decline in the birthrate, school enrollment will be dropping 11 percent nationwide from 1972 to 1982. Local districts may find their enrollment problems worsened by such additional factors as population migration, changes in age of community residents, and increases in private school enrollments and dropout rates. At present, a third of local districts are losing students.

This report, which incorporates a review of the literature and nationwide surveys, discusses the causes of the decline, planning,

public relations, and district responses to the decline. It includes numerous district examples and a fifty-one-item bibliography.

The report surveys reduction problems and gives several suggestions for local districts. Districts should consider determining a satisfactory student-teacher ratio, encouraging natural turnover, developing alternatives to across-the-board teacher layoffs, and arranging school exchange days for teachers to be transferred.

6. National School Public Relations Association. *Declining Enrollment: Current Trends in School Policies and Programs*. Arlington, Virginia 1976. 65 pages. ED 130 450.

Based on a nationwide survey, interviews with practitioners, and a review of the literature, this report is thorough and comprehensive. It incorporates numerous examples as it mixes fact and advice. Declining enrollment has brought serious problems, especially when conjoined with rising costs, declining revenues, and growing public alienation from education. The tasks of declining enrollment require leadership responsive to human needs as well as facts and the involvement of staff and community in decision-making.

The report covers the problems of declining enrollment, enrollment projection, alternative responses (which can bring educational improvement), public involvement, and the use of a task force. Its chapter on staff reduction synthesizes the available literature and discusses means of alleviating reduction problems, the interests of teacher unions, and reduction policies and procedures. The report concludes with five case studies that emphasize the process of problem resolution.

7. Nolte, M. Chester. "Follow These 'How to's' When You Must Cut Your Staff." *The American School Board Journal*, 163, 7 (July 1976), pp 26-27, 45. EJ 141 226.

Staff reduction problems, Nolte writes, are relatively new and so dependent on local conditions that few cases are the same. Responding to the need for usable reduction guidelines, Nolte offers general advice that can help districts develop local policies suitable to their needs.

The most important thing, he emphasizes, is developing policies and procedures early and before they are needed, even while enrollment increases or remains steady. Districts will also want,

he continues, to stimulate natural attrition and cut expenses to the bone, make their policies clear to employees and the community, follow state and federal law closely, and reach agreement on reduction with local teacher unions. To help teachers find new jobs, districts should also openly declare that teachers have been dismissed for financial reasons and not because of incompetence.

Nolte illustrates his discussion of these and other recommendations with district examples and includes the reduction provisions of a sample negotiated contract.

8. Nolte, M. Chester. "How to Tell Which Teachers to Keep and Which to Lay Off." *The American School Board Journal*, 163, 6 (June 1976), pp. 28-30. EJ 139 362.

Although most writers argue that staff reduction should not be based on teacher competence, many educators, including Nolte, favor such an approach. Nolte, the past president of the National Organization on Legal Problems of Education, discusses a means to base reduction on merit and still satisfy court standards. Such reduction can succeed, he states, if districts avoid arbitrary or capricious decisions, a pattern of discriminatory action, and damage of teacher reputation. Districts need to pay attention to the process of reduction, being careful to follow the state tenure law process and to support decisions with adequate factual information.

Vague evaluative criteria or rating scales, he warns, will not suffice in court. He suggests that districts instead base selection primarily on teacher effectiveness, as demonstrated by student achievement, and secondarily on the criteria of firmness, friendliness, and fairness, which he carefully defines and illustrates.

9. Oregon State Department of Education. *Reduction in Force: Suggested Personnel Policy Guidelines for School Districts*. Salem, Oregon: Division of Administrative Support, 1977. 20 pages. ED 137 904.

While most publications highlight specific staff reduction issues, this state guide comprehensively treats all aspects of reduction. It presents districts with a listing of required and suggested procedures and occasionally offers a choice of options. The state warns that local boards should seek legal counsel before adapting general guidelines to fit local needs. It also advises early planning for reduction, suggesting that districts develop procedures "in a nonemotional setting and before a crisis occurs."

In clear outline form, the guide discusses ways of developing a plan for carrying out a staff reduction. The plan includes such steps as deciding on the need for reduction, determining which positions and activities to cut, adopting procedures for actually reducing staff, and defining grievance and recall procedures. A district's reduction procedures need to specify means of identifying specific positions to be cut, by grade, school, subject, or department; stimulating natural attrition; selecting staff to be retained; and notifying teachers to be dismissed. Although the guidelines are sometimes directly tied to Oregon law, they should be generally applicable to districts outside Oregon.

10. Powell, Janet F., and Sternnock, Suzanne K. *Local Policies for Reduction in Force*. ERS Information Aid. Arlington, Virginia: Educational Research Service, 1975. 18 pages. ED 105 574.

In a brief overview of staff reduction problems, Powell and Sternnock state that seniority, traditionally the major criterion



in staff reduction, has been challenged by the newly gained job security rights of nontenured teachers and by court-mandated affirmative action requirements. They present a thorough list of seventy questions regarding reduction policies for consideration by local districts.

Under the general area of layoff order, for instance, they ask districts to consider the following issues: (1) the relative importance of tenure, seniority, qualifications, and performance as retention criteria; (2) the definition of seniority in terms of total teaching experience or years of service in the system, in a department, or at a grade level; (3) the determination of date of employment; (4) the place of various types of leaves in the determination of seniority; (5) the means of judging qualifications and performance; (6) the granting of special preference to teacher association officers; and (7) the transfer of administrators to teaching positions.

The bulk of the publication consists of sample reduction policies and contract provisions—some very specific—from sixteen districts. The report offers no evaluation or recommendations, but the suggestive questions and sample policies should aid districts by raising all pertinent issues.

11. Schultz, Raymond E. "A Sane Approach to Staff Reduction." *Community College Review*, 3, 3 (January 1976), pp. 6-13. EJ 133 029.

After an overview of the staff reduction problem, Schultz argues that the strict use of seniority in reduction, while expedient, will create serious problems in the long run. It will offer the least financial relief, contribute to a faculty age imbalance and the loss of new ideas, and cause affirmative action problems.

Schultz provides a detailed step-by-step approach to reduction that considers alternatives to strict seniority selection. While he favors the laying off of nontenured staff before tenured staff, he advises institutions to keep essential faculty, regardless of classification, and pay attention to such factors as race, sex, and age. The major selection criterion should be the importance of staff to individual programs and the institution. When deviating from seniority, institutions will need to document why retained faculty are more important to their programs.

In discussing due process procedures, Schultz states that, according to recent court decisions, an institution must provide dismissed faculty with a written statement explaining its decision to terminate, a description of the manner by which it

reached its decision, the information used in making its decision, and an opportunity to respond

12. Sinowitz, Betty E. and Hallam, Charlotte. "Fighting Reductions in Force" *Today's Education*, 64, 2 (March-April 1975), pp. 32-34, 96. EJ 131 690

While most available literature addresses administrators and school boards, Sinowitz and Hallam address local education associations. They discuss association actions that can minimize the problems of staff reduction and describe several court cases in which dismissed teachers have challenged school boards.

Teacher associations, the authors argue, should carefully review the facts when districts propose reductions due to district reorganization, declining enrollments, or budget problems and "question any failure of districts to seek and use all available resources" and alternatives. Such scrutiny, the authors note, can enable an association to successfully fight a reduction in force. Districts should seek to "maintain all existing staff positions" so that they can "increase the quality of services to students," through lowered student-teacher ratios, additional individualized instruction, and new programs.

When reductions become necessary, the authors state, associations should insist that districts satisfy statutory and contractual agreements and due process, which typically demand "timely notice, statement of reasons, a hearing, and the right to appeal to a court." Associations should also urge the use of objective criteria for reduction, such as certification (of prime importance), seniority, degrees, and experience.

Administrators might not be pleased with the authors' adversary tone, but they should appreciate this warning, or challenge, as they strive to develop workable reduction policies.

13. Thomas, Donald. "Strategies for Closing a School, Reducing Staffs." *NASSP Bulletin*, 61, 407 (March 1977), pp. 8-19. EJ number not yet assigned

Thomas, superintendent of the Salt Lake City schools, which have suffered a 38 percent enrollment decline, offers some useful advice to other administrators. Districts facing enrollment decline, he states, must find ways to reduce staff, utilize or sell surplus space, conserve finances, increase transportation services, and generate staff and community support. He briefly discusses all these tasks and elaborates on school closure and staff reduction.

For districts considering reduction, he suggests several actions that can "save money," "minimize terminations," and "create new opportunities." To begin with, districts can staff for midyear rather than fall enrollments, to prevent overstaffing, adopt an early retirement plan, and aggressively seek government and private funding for new services, which will use extra staff. They can also work with neighboring districts to share or transfer staff, retrain secondary teachers for the more frequently vacated elementary positions, and use surplus teachers as a corps of substitutes. They can also adopt an aggressive policy for terminating incompetent teachers. The Salt Lake schools, Thomas notes, have enjoyed success and teacher cooperation in their termination effort, which provides due process and allows teachers time to improve. Thomas concludes by advising management to work closely with staff throughout the reduction process.